

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
9 August 1966

State Dept. review completed

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HIGHLIGHTS

A US Marine patrol was attacked by a company-size Communist force yesterday in northernmost Quang Tri Province. Interrogation of recently captured enemy personnel [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] reveals that Communist units in several areas are suffering manpower problems, including a high rate of illness from malaria.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:

A US Marine patrol encountered a Communist force in northern Quang Tri Province, resulting in 37 enemy killed (Para. 1). As many as 170 Viet Cong may have been killed as the result of an allied air strike in Operation COLORADO/LIEN KET 52 in Quang Nam and Quang Tin provinces (Para. 2). Recently captured enemy troops report large number of malaria cases in their units (Paras. 3-4).

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

French-owned rubber plantations in Binh Long Province remain open as the result of political and military action (Paras. 1-3). A letter from the Buddhist Institute blames US policy toward South Vietnam for much of the trouble in the country (Paras. 5-6). The GVN has answered an earlier four-point letter from the Buddhist Institute which demanded clarification of government policy toward the "struggle" movement and "strugglers" (Paras. 6-7).

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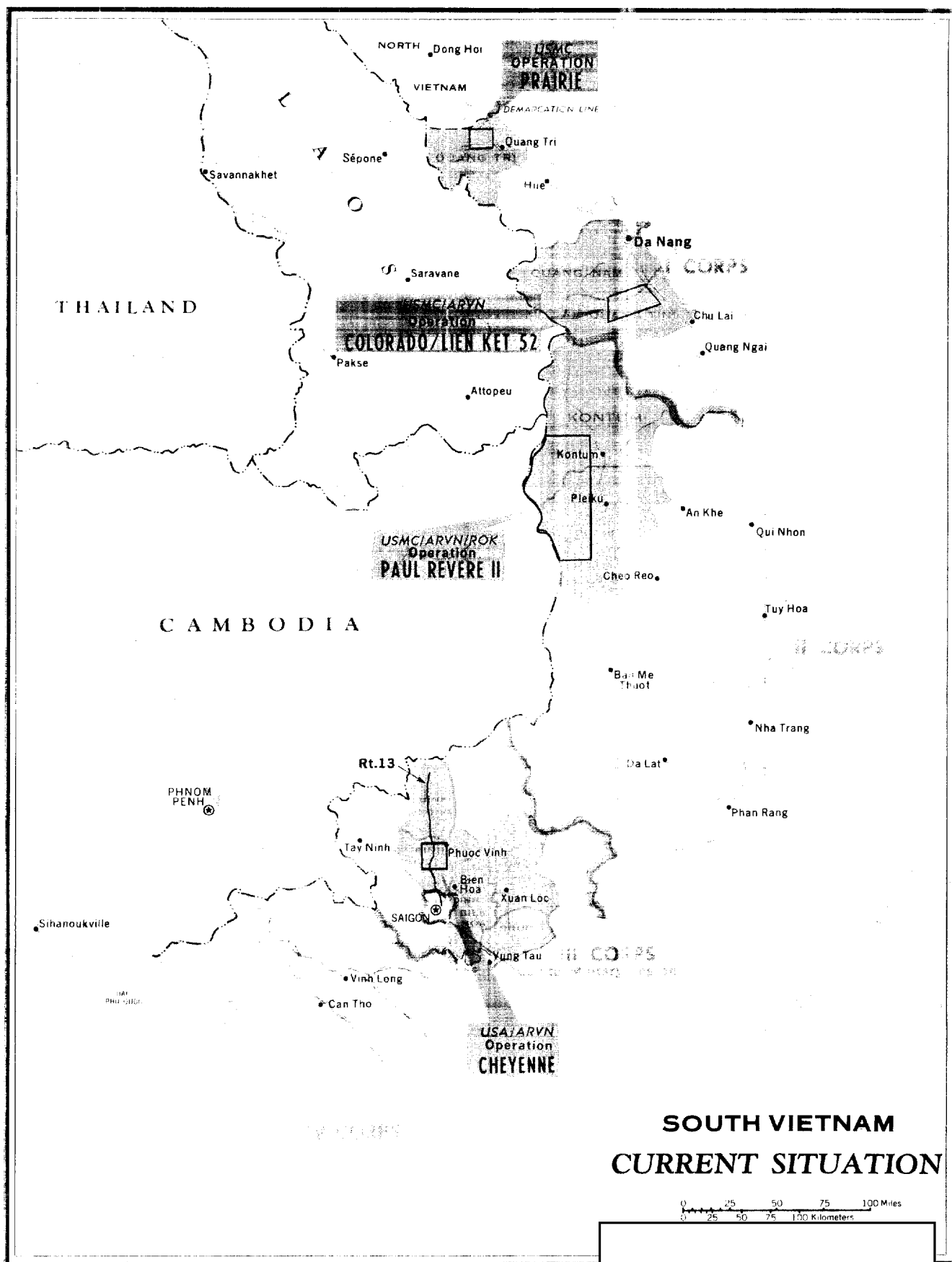
IV. Other Communist Military Developments:
There is nothing of significance to report.

V. Communist Political Developments: A group of North Vietnamese Government and party officials has been reported in the USSR (Para. 1).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Thai Foreign Minister Thanat has indicated that one major purpose of his proposal for an Asian-sponsored conference to settle the Vietnam war was to "force" Asian countries to adopt a clearer stand on the war (Paras. 1-3).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. A US Marine reconnaissance patrol, participating in Operation PRAIRIE, was attacked in the jungle-covered mountains of northern Quang Tri Province yesterday by an estimated company-size enemy force. Tactical air strikes and artillery fire supported the Marines until reinforcements could be helilifted into the area. Thirty-seven Communist troops were killed in the action; American losses were five killed and 31 wounded.

2. South Vietnamese Marines participating in Operation COLORADO/LIEN KET 52 reported finding 170 Viet Cong bodies (30 confirmed by US body count) yesterday in an area about 30 miles south of Da Nang. The bodies were found in the vicinity of a 7 August allied air strike. Cumulative friendly casualties for this multibattalion allied operation, which began on 5 August in Quang Tin and Quang Nam provinces, were 15 killed (1 US) and 68 wounded (6 US). A total of 254 Communists has thus far been reported killed.

More VC/NVA Manpower Difficulties

3. Some 20 Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) personnel, captured on 6 August, stated that they were from the communications wire support company of the 3rd NVA Regiment, 620th Division. The captives estimated that up to 90 percent of the 3rd Regiment--last located in Quang Tin Province--was afflicted with malaria. At least half of the 20 prisoners also had malaria.

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4. The 32nd and 66th NVA regiments may also be having manpower difficulties as a result of malaria. The interrogation of two captives taken during Operation PAUL REVERE in the central highlands indicates that the 32nd Regiment may be 800 men below its accepted strength of 2,000, while at least one battalion of the 66th Regiment was more than 50 percent depleted and had received only four replacements since the first of the year. The captive from the 66th Regiment stated that as many as 40 percent of the remaining men in his battalion were suffering from malaria.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. A decision by French owners to close rubber plantations in Binh Long Province was deferred as a result of intercession by Prime Minister Ky and of subsequent military operations to clear lines of communication into the plantation area, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The plantations concerned were due to close on 1 August, but Ky promised a representative of the rubber companies that they would be adequately supplied with the items that they needed. The immediate follow-up to this promise was an airdrop of rice on 31 July and a promise of more help by the GVN.

2. A large combined US Army/ARVN effort, Operation CHEYENNE, was initiated on 1 August to clear Route 13, the major land line of communication to the French-owned plantations. The effort was successful to the extent that a convoy of more than 300 trucks was able to deliver much-needed rice and fuel. On the return trip, the convoy carried out about 300 tons of rubber.

3. Although the US/ARVN road clearing effort of 1-5 August was successful, it was still only a stopgap solution. There are no indications that Route 13 remains free of Viet Cong interdiction, or that there is now a free flow of traffic over this vital communication link. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] there are still some 2,500 tons of rubber to be moved from the plantations. The reported French decision to keep these plantations open, even though they do not operate as economically as ones in other countries of Southeast Asia, indicates a French desire to maintain a continued presence in a vital South Vietnamese industry.

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4. The text of the Buddhist Institute's 6 August letter, addressed principally to the Secretary General of the United Nations and the UN Human Rights Commission, lays blame for a large measure of South Vietnam's problems on US policy toward the country. Calling "mistaken" a policy "which always supports individuals in office," the letter goes on to say that "the US Government must bear responsibility for regrettable incidents of the past." The letter, signed by acting chairman of the Buddhist Institute Thich Thien Hoa, bears down heavily on a theme of religious persecution by the GVN, and pleads for the UN Secretary General and the Human Rights Commission to seek out ways to help save the Vietnamese nation, the Buddhist religion, and, in particular, the life of Thich Tri Quang.

5. The letter, which has apparently caused no stir in Saigon political circles, may be an end-run effort of the Buddhist leadership to see how far they will be permitted to go in criticizing the government. An overly permissive posture by the government may, in the light of past experience, invite further Buddhist probes.

6. The GVN, according to press accounts, today replied to a 30 July letter of the Buddhist Institute demanding that the government clarify its position toward the recent "struggle" movement and toward the treatment of Buddhist clergy and laity now detained. The government's reply to the four-point Buddhist missive denies that it considers struggles for freedom and democracy illegal; only "illegal means" are subject to governmental censure. Concerning prosecution of the persons now held for their part in the "struggle" movement, the GVN answered that investigations are under way and that only those who have violated the law will be tried. As for freedom of the press and the censoring of Buddhist communiqués, the government's reply states that its policy is to allow all signed communications to be published and that only anonymous items will be denied press exposure.

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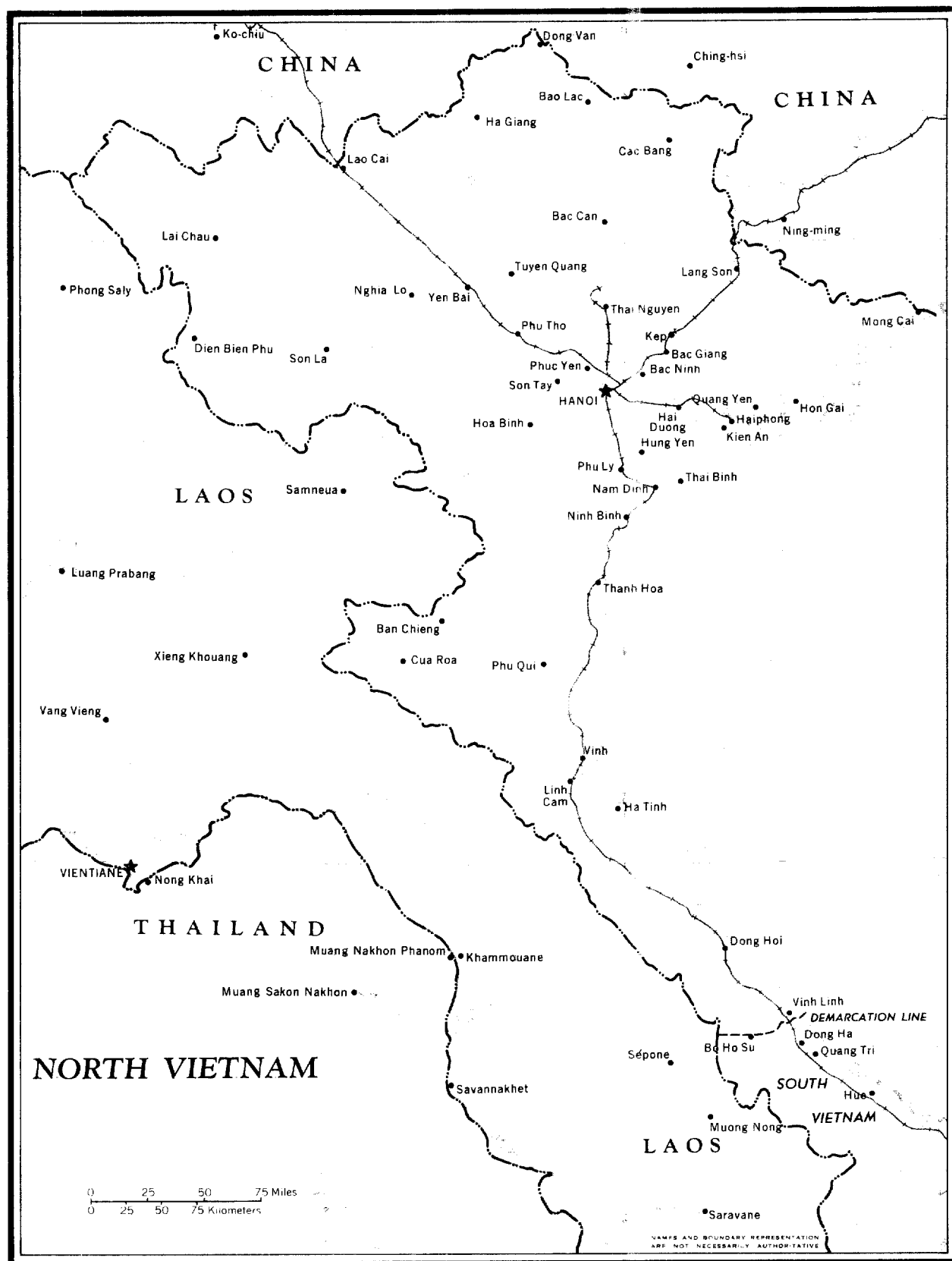
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7. The Buddhist Institute has largely rejected the GVN reply. The Institute position is that the government reply does not directly answer the questions posed by them. For the moment, at least, the issue appears to be stalemated between the GVN and the Institute, but further Buddhist complaints will probably surface in the near future.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. According to a TASS broadcast on 9 August, a group of "statesmen and party officials from the DRV" were in the Soviet Union from 6 July to 9 August at the invitation of the CPSU central committee for "a holiday and medical treatment." There is as yet no indication as to what officials made up the delegation although the hospitality reportedly accorded it by Soviet officials--including a meeting with a member of the party secretariat, Kapitonov--would indicate that some of the members were of at least of central committee rank.

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Thai Foreign Minister Thanat told US Ambassador Martin yesterday that he did not expect the Communists to respond favorably to his 3 August proposal that the Vietnam war be settled at an Asian-sponsored conference. North Vietnam and Communist China have, in fact, both denounced the proposal. Thanat indicated, however, that one purpose of his initiative was to "force" Asian nations to take a clearer stand on the war. He believed that the response to a Thai-Malaysian-Philippine note of 8 August, calling for an Asian appeal to the countries involved to negotiate an end to the war, would be "surprising" and would refute allegations that the US presence in South Vietnam is universally unpopular in Asia.

2. Thanat said that if favorable responses were received from half of the 16 Asian countries to whom the note was sent, he would then try to arrange an early September conference to which the nations involved in the war, including Communist China, North Vietnam, and the US, would be invited. If the Communists refuse to attend, as Thanat anticipates, then the conference would be limited to Asian nations and would be the occasion for a general airing of views on how the war can be ended.

3. In Saigon, Foreign Minister Do has stated that the South Vietnamese Government welcomes the Thai effort, and has indicated that Premier Ky will make a favorable response in a speech to be given on 12 August during his visit to Manila.

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